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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7687

INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000265

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#) [RW](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: GOMA NOTES - NAIROBI PROCESS: 13TH MEETING OF JMG TASK FORCE, MARCH 14, 2008

REF: Kinshasa 258

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The main agenda item of the March 14 meeting of the Nairobi process Joint Monitoring Group (JMG) Task Force was the DRC's plans for action against the ex-FAR/Interahamwe (ex-FAR/IH). FARDC and MONUC are planning to do something at some point in the coming months, but March 15 will be no D-Day and significant operations will only build up over time. The UNSC Resolution on the FDLR was welcomed by all delegations. The Kisangani GDRC-FDLR meeting has been deferred until after consultations being organized in Rome. There was no progress on JMG-Joint Verification Team collaboration, as the minutes of the JMG envoys' February 15 Brussels meeting have still not been received. MONUC is now struggling to find ways to siphon off personnel from existing units to meet the needs of operations against the ex-FAR/IH without detracting from its ability to ramp up its support to the Goma cease-fire. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The 13th meeting of the Nairobi process Joint Monitoring Group (JMG) Task Force actually ended ahead of schedule, running from approximately 1045 to approximately 1400. It was professional, courteous, and reasonably focused throughout. Colonel Augustin Mamba was again at the head of the Congolese delegation, and there were once again substantive matters to discuss. A bit of time was spent on the minutes, but this was negligible compared to past marathons. The main agenda item was, inevitably, the DRC's plans for action against the ex-FAR/Interahamwe (the use of the term "FDLR" is banned at Task Force meetings, in deference to Rwandan sensitivities). All delegations were present.

DRC post-March 15 plans

¶3. (SBU) Mamba's presentation was fairly Delphic, much to the frustration of the Rwandans, who wanted details. In general, he made it pretty clear that things have moved into a new phase and that FARDC and MONUC are planning to do something at some point in the coming months. His references to the need to build assets and to the constraints on any operations prior to June, however, meant that his overall message was consistent with what we have been given to understand by other sources -- i.e., March 15 will be no D-Day and significant operations will only build up over time. Mamba made the following points:

¶4. (SBU) He outlined the diplomatic steps that have led up to March 15, emphasizing that the deadline itself was set by the DRC in an exchange of letters with the Rwandan government. Diplomatic and political initiatives continue despite the expiration of the deadline.

¶5. (SBU) He noted that the FARDC face conflict on two fronts:

against the ex-FAR/IH on the one hand and against Congolese armed groups on the other. While the Goma Acte d'engagement put in place a cease-fire with and between the latter, the launching of offensive operations ("la guerre que nous devons ouvrir aujourd'hui") against ex-FAR/IH may destabilize things on the armed group side and, if FARDC and MONUC are not careful, allow for opportunistic skirmishing or outright conflict to resume. All the more so since in most areas the expected (MONUC) interposition forces have not yet been deployed.

¶6. (SBU) He said the campaign that has been planned jointly with MONUC will be long and complex. Ex-FAR/IH represents 5,000-7,000 men deployed over an area in North and South Kivu that is 550 km x 250 km, and in which there are up to 10 million inhabitants, including four major urban areas. Ex-FAR/IH are dispersed among the civilian population, and control significant economic resources. A few are indeed ex-FAR from the genocide period, but most are either people who came here as children or were born in the DRC. If you count women and children, as many as 30 per cent of the total target population is in fact Congolese.

¶7. (SBU) He said the aim of the ex-FAR/IH is to create sufficient pressure on the Rwandan government to bring about a return negotiated on more favorable terms. The GDRC now considers the ex-FAR/IH its enemy. However, this situation means that even as coercive actions begin, political and diplomatic activity must continue, and the expected meeting in Kisangani is consistent with this.

¶8. (SBU) He stated that joint military operations with MONUC will commence immediately. He said, as a military officer speaking to colleagues, he didn't need to explain his reasons for not being precise about when, where or how this will happen. Operations will

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be complicated by the humanitarian situation and the fact that the ex-FAR/IH have in the past showed a tendency to retaliate against attacks by attacking civilians. Steps will need to be taken to protect the latter. Joint military operations will require a considerable reinforcement in men and materiel. Brigades that have been trained up by MONUC have been or will soon be deployed. Materiel is being secured. Building up to full strength will take time.

¶9. (SBU) He noted that operations of any significance can really only be conducted during the June-August dry season. So joint operations will be conducted in two phases: (1) immediate action by assets already deployed to limit the target group's freedom of movement; (2) later operations, with units presently in training, aimed at strengthening the FARDC's positions in the campaign's four main sectors: a) Lubero-Kanyabayonga; b) Masisi-Humbo-Walikale; c) Shabunda-Mukungu-Mwenga; and d) Mulenge-Fizi-Uvira. Mamba said he wanted everyone (local population and neighboring states) to be advised to expect significant FARDC movements in the coming weeks. (Comment: There are surely Goma process cease-fire implications to this. End comment.)

¶10. (SBU) He said FARDC Chief of Staff General Dieudonne Kayembe would arrive in Goma March 15 to review plans in place and brief the senior civilian leadership. He would be joined by MONUC Force Commander General Babacar Gaye and the Rwandan Chief of Staff. This was the first the Rwandan delegation had heard of the latter, and during conversations at break-time and again at the end of the meeting they were understandably skeptical that this would happen.

¶11. (SBU) Note: In a subsequent phone call, MONUC Eastern Division Chief of Staff Colonel Clive Newell confirmed that Kayembe and Eastern Division Commander General Bikram Singh, acting for Gaye (on leave), would arrive the following day to hold a joint meeting with FARDC and CNDP. There is a meeting with the Rwandan Chief of Staff planned -- in Goma -- but this was not to take place until Monday March 17. End note.

¶12. (SBU) The conversation was then joined by a MONUC North Kivu Brigade IndBatt Major (G2). The Rwandan delegation asked about

MONUC's current planning for any pre-emptive strikes by the ex-FAR/IH, to which there was no real answer, and about MONUC's assessment of the target group's readiness, to which the major's answers were again evasive ("they're in small mobile units, hard to assess their strength or their intentions ...")

Other Matters Discussed

¶13. (SBU) UNSC Resolution on FDLR: This was welcomed by all delegations. It will add a powerful tool, all agreed, to the DRC's "sensibilisation" campaign. The Rwandans asked that it be given the widest possible coverage by local media. The delegate from the World Bank's MDRP program said that he could confirm this was already happening in Kinshasa. In sidebar conversations, a Rwandan delegate said that they were particularly gratified to the reference in the resolution to previous "French-led" efforts -- this would, he felt, help cut ground out from under the ex-FAR/IH.

¶14. (SBU) Kisangani GDRC-FDLR meeting: This could not be held as planned on Wednesday March 13, as only the FDLR moderates were willing to come. It will be deferred until the others can be persuaded. (We understand that this will happen following consultations being organized by Sant'Egidio in Rome.) The Rwandans have always been skeptical and demanded to know who, exactly, is expected to attend, but the Congolese pointed out that the meeting has been given added legitimacy by its specific mention in the UNSC resolution.

¶15. (SBU) JMG-Joint Verification Team (JVT) collaboration (reftel): The minutes of the JMG envoys' February 15 Brussels meeting have still not been received, despite multiple requests and promises, so there could be no progress on this.

¶16. (SBU) Next week's agenda: Will include a specific item, requested by Rwanda, on operations conducted and results achieved.

Comment

¶17. (SBU) In a conversation with U.S. delegates prior to the Task Force meeting, Newell was anxious for us to know that, in his opinion (NB not necessarily shared by MONUC Kinshasa) FARDC was

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getting ahead of itself on operations against the ex-FAR/Interahamwe. His main concern was that FARDC may start deploying deep into the various sectors without adequate support from MONUC, and that MONUC will need to scramble to join them.

¶18. (SBU) Newell is now struggling to find ways to siphon off personnel from existing units to meet this need, but he is worried that this has to be done systematically and in ways that do not detract from MONUC's ability to ramp up its support to the Goma cease-fire. He said FARDC senior command had sent MONUC for comment a draft order intended for its 8th (North Kivu) and 10th (South Kivu) regional military commands. Newell said MONUC found much of the content of this directive to be lacking and developed a long series of questions and comments. However, Newell said he understood that FARDC eventually sent it out without reference to these. End comment.

GARVELINK